

History of the Belfast Giants

Aéilíníus 🍀



The year 2000 brought about the new millennium and a new time of peace for Northern Ireland. The country was developing like never before, the people were always looking for something new and the sport of ice hockey was going to bring just that!

The Belfast Giants took the entire country by storm, and after 3 months of road games, they made history on their opening night in December 2000 by selling out the Odyssey Arena. They may have lost that first game, but they won the hearts of an entire nation and started an ice hockey phenomenon that still remains today. They were in dead last up until they began playing at the Odyssey Arena and they virtually became unbeatable at home after that, thanks mostly to the atmosphere at home and the sell-out crowds.

The next season, there was not a better team in the UK, with the Giants winning a league title in 2002. The Giants clinched their league title in January of that season, still a record for UK hockey. Led by the trio of Jason Ruff, Kevin Riehl and Sean Berens, the Giants dominated the Superleague on route to their first major championship. Giant tough guy Paxton Schulte had become the face of the Giants and their most popular player, leading the team in powerplay goals and fights every season of his career. Schulte was considered the Giant among the men, and had become a legendary sporting figure throughout Northern Ireland. To this day when you mention the Belfast Giants, the name Paxton Schulte immediately comes up.

In 2003 once again under the guidance of coach Dave Whistle, the Giants finished league runners up, losing out on a second consecutive league title by a single point on the last night of the season to the Sheffield Steelers. They also hosted a mid-season qualifying tournament for the European Championships known as the Continental Cup with the winner advancing to the SUPER 10 Finals of the Continental Cup in Switzerland. The Giants won their qualifying tournament by winning three games in three nights and went on to battle for European supremacy as possibly the biggest underdogs to ever make the Super 10 Finals. They did themselves proud, and although they lost to host team Lugano 1-0, they beat Swiss Champions Davos 5-3 the next night. The Swiss fans were so shocked that they gave the Giants a standing ovation after their victory.

The Giants came back from Switzerland on a high and after playing a grueling 16 game preliminary playoff schedule, they met the Steelers in the semi-final game of the Playoff Final Four Weekend. The two teams had battled all season long and this game was another classic match between the best teams in the UK.

The game finished tied 0-0 and even overtime couldn't decide this one. It went down to a shoot-out with Giants superstar Kevin Riehl scoring the winning goal and goaltender Ryan Bach stopping all three shooters from the Steelers to put the Giants into the final game the next night. They went on to beat the London Knights for their first playoff title in their three-year history.

That summer the SuperLeague changed to the Elite League and Dave Whistle moved on to coach in Germany. The league was restructured to require non-import players into the lineup, which meant a lot of the heroes in the Giants line-up over the last few years would be moving on as well. Despite the setbacks, the Giants remained the premier place to play in the UK. For two seasons, they struggled to win silverware but in 2005/06 the Giants once again were at the top.

Ed Courtenay was brought in as player/coach and NHL Superstar Theo Fleury agreed to terms to join the team in mid-October. Although the Giants were in first place before his arrival, Theo immediately became the new hero of Belfast and went on to lead the league in scoring, picking up the MVP Award along the way. The Giants fought hard and despite a season long battle with the Newcastle Vipers, the Giants won the League Championship in 2006.

The next season, a disappointing run late in the season saw the Giants slip out of first place with only a handful of games remaining finishing in second place behind their rivals the Coventry Blaze. Last season after an injury riddled start, the Giants went on a 16 game winning streak, going all the way into first place before eventually finishing in fourth.

General Manager Todd Kelman moved quickly to replace coach Ed Courtenay who had decided to retire from the game after last season. He signed former Giant star Steve Thornton who had been the player/assistant coach in Basingstoke during the 2007/08 season. Kelman and Thornton had won a playoff title together in 2003 with the Giants and together plan on bringing the glory days back to the people of Belfast.

2008-2009 proved to be the most successful season ever for the Giants, with the team capturing the Challenge Cup and the British Knock-Out Cup for the first time in their short history. After such a successful season the team is geared up for more great things yet to come.

Year 1 – 2000-01 – Fifth Place Finish

Year 2 – 2001-02 – League Champions

Year 3 – 2002-03 – Playoff Champions, League Runner Up

Year 4 – 2003-04 – Fourth Place Finish

Year 5 – 2004-05 – League Runner Up, National Crossover Cup Champions

Year 6 – 2005-06 – League Champions

Year 7 – 2006-07 – League Runner Up

Year 8 – 2007-08 – Fourth Place Finish

Year 9 – 2008-09 – Fourth Place Finish, Challenge Cup & British Knock-Out Cup Champions

Belfast Giants 2010-2011 Roster

Netminders

1	Nathan Craze	Merthyr Tydfil, Wales	26/11/86	6ft0"	175lbs
31	Stephen Murphy	Dundee, Scotland	11/12/81	5ft9"	158lbs

Defence

2	Richard Seeley	Powell River, BC	30/04/79	6ft2"	215lbs
3	Jeff Mason	Easthampton, MA	11/08/81	5ft10'	195lbs
5	Jon Gleed	Milton, ON	03/01/84	6ft2"	212lbs
8	Tim Cook	Montclair, NJ	13/03/84	6ft4"	195lbs
18	Graeme Walton	Belfast, Northern Ireland	17/06/82	6ft0"	195lbs
24	Doug Christiansen	Milwaukee, WI	23/05/78	6ft5"	245lbs
33	Mike Hoffman	Scituate, MA	20/09/80	6ft5"	248lbs

Forwards

7	Mark Garside	EastKilbride, Scotland	21/03/89	5ft9"	175lbs
9	Mike Bayrack	Edmonton, AL	17/9/78	5ft11"	205lbs
12	Colin Hemingway	Regina, SASK	12/08/80	6ft0"	195lbs
15	Brett Hemingway	Surrey, BC	28/09/83	6ft1"	190lbs
17	Joshua Prudden	Andover, MA	07/11/81	5ft10"	190lbs
19	Colin Shields	Glasgow, Scotland	27/01/80	5ft11"	175lbs
23	Dan Welch	Hastings, MN	23/02/81	5ft11"	193lbs
26	Brandon Benedict	Halifax, NS	16/06/82	5ft9"	175lbs
71	Craig Peacock	Peterborough, England	08/08/88	5ft10"	168lbs

Coaches and staff

TODD KELMAN (General Manager)



Todd Kelman accepted the job as General Manager in October 2006 and spent the rest of the 2006-07 season learning the day to day operations while finishing his final year as a player with the Giants. He took over full time as GM in April 2007, and has successfully built on the on ice success of the Giants, with crowd sizes steadily increasing year on year. A former St Louis Blues draft pick, Todd played ten years pro in the UK, three with the Bracknell Bees and seven with the Giants.

Kelman graduated with honours from Bowling Green University in 1997 and made the move to Europe the following September. After three years and one championship in his final year with Bracknell, he made the move over to Belfast to become one of the original Belfast Giants. In his seven years playing with the team he won three championships, league titles in 2002 and 2006 and the Playoff Trophy in 2003. He retired as the franchise's all-time leader in games played appearing in 419 games and as the top scoring defenceman of all time.

DOUG CHRISTIANSEN (Head Coach)



Doug Christiansen joins the Belfast Giants as Head Coach, after three seasons as Coach of the Edinburgh Capitals. In 2009-2010, after guiding the Capitals to their best season in franchise history, he was named EIHL Coach of the Year by the British Ice Hockey Writers' Association.

Previously, Christiansen played 8 seasons professionally in the AHL, ECHL, UHL, Italy, and the UK. His best season was in 2005-2006 when he played for the Reading Royals in the ECHL. He was named team MVP and finished 4th in the ECHL goal scoring stats.

Christiansen graduated with honors from Union College in 2002 and will shortly graduate with a Masters in Sports Business Management from the University of Edinburgh. Prior to college, Christiansen played for the Green Bay Gamblers where he won a National Championship in 1997..

ROB STEWART (Assistant Coach)



Rob Stewart rejoined the Belfast Giants in 2008, after spending two seasons as head coach of the Romford Raiders. No stranger to Belfast, Stewart played for the Giants for 3 seasons before becoming player/coach in 2003/04, the first season in the Elite League. The following season he coached in Sheffield and a year later he returned to playing with the Giants helping them to a League Title in 2006.

JASON 'TAFF' ELLERY (Equipment Manager)



Jason "Taff" Ellery is full time equipment manager for the Belfast Giants. Taff applied his trade in the UK with the Longon Knights and also the Cardiff Devils in his native Wales. Often the first man to arrive at the rink and the last to leave, Taff plays a key role in the teams preparation for games and training sessions, ensuring each player has the equipment they need to compete and carrying out any repairs and maintenance such as sewing jerseys, laundry and sharpening skates.

LOUISE LITTLE (Community Foundation Co-Ordinator)



Louise came on board with the Belfast Giants in November 2009 as part of the Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) with the Univeristy of Ulster. Louise's role is to develop the Community Foundation activities of the LBM Belfast Giants throughout the Northern Ireland community at large.

Louise previously worked for Cooperation Ireland where she was Project Co-ordinator over the past two and a half years on their largest cross-community and cross-border reconciliation initiative, the CORE Project. Before officially joining the Giants, she co-ordinated the summer Giant HEROS Camps in 2008 and 2009, which brought together 'at-risk' young people from Finglas (Dublin), East Belfast and Short Strand.

DOROTHY ENNIS (Office Manager)



Having previously assisted the Belfast Giants as a volunteer, Dorothy joins the Giants for the 2010/11 season. A qualified accountant with a wealth of commercial experience in both public and private sectors, Dorothy will co-ordinate the day to day running of the office.

Press Launch For Giants vs Bruins Clash In Belfast

Posted on Thursday, July 8th, 2010 at 3:16 pm



Yesterday saw the official press launch of the Bruins game in October. The announcement was made by Minister Arlene Foster on behalf of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board which has provided support and sponsorship for the much anticipated game. The game, which is also being sponsored by Belfast City Council, will mark the ten year anniversary of the Odyssey since it opened in 2000 and began hosting the Belfast Giants.

The Boston Bruins are one of the most famous hockey teams in the National Hockey League (NHL) and the securing of the game in Belfast is expected to attract over 4,500 out of state visitors and generate over £800,000 into the local economy, as ice hockey fans across the UK and America travel to witness the Bruins' inaugural European game.

Press coverage from yesterday's event at the Odyssey Arena is available on the [Belfast Telegraph Website](#) and also on the [UTV Sport uPlayer](#)

Minister for the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Arlene Foster, said:

"The visit of the Boston Bruins is great news for Northern Ireland and will attract a huge boost to the tourism industry. This will be the first time that the National Hockey League is playing here and provides an excellent opportunity to showcase Northern Ireland as a top tourist destination. We are delighted to have been able to support the Belfast Giant's in bringing the Bruin's to Northern Ireland and we look forward to a great game."

Belfast Giants General Manager, Todd Kelman, who was in Boston last week to agree the deal with the Bruins, said: "This is a big day for the Giants and a big day for the entire league. We are really looking forward to welcoming the Bruins to Belfast to see our great city and to give our fans the opportunity to witness one of the best ice hockey teams in the world in action. This game is the perfect opportunity to celebrate the Belfast Giant's ten year anniversary having been playing at the Odyssey since it opened a decade ago."

Belfast Lord Mayor, Councillor Pat Convery, said: “For any NHL team to come to Ireland is a major achievement, but for the Boston Bruins, one of the best teams in the world to come to Belfast is a truly outstanding opportunity. The visit in October by the Bruins to play our Belfast Giants is as a result of a lot of hard work and collaboration between a range of organisations and Belfast City Council is proud to have played its part in securing its visit. We are really looking forward to the big match in October.”

Alan Gibson, Chairman of the Odyssey Trust Company, which was instrumental in securing the game for Northern Ireland, added: “We are delighted that the Boston Bruins, who are one of the original National Hockey League teams, have chosen the Odyssey as the first venue in their European tour. We are extremely proud of our Belfast Giants team and the securing of this game is another major achievement in the team’s ten year history and another brilliant milestone in the successful history of the Odyssey.”

Bruins forward Shawn Thornton, who recently signed with the Bruins for a further two years, said that the game in Northern Ireland was one of the reasons he wanted to re-sign: “It’ll be awesome ... It’ll be unbelievable,” he told the Boston Herald. “My mom is from Belfast. I’m excited about this. I’ve been talking about it since we first heard about it. I’ve never been over there. ... I know the (Bruins’ Czech players) are really excited about Prague, but I’m more excited about Belfast.”

Other sponsors of the game include Invest NI and Tourism Ireland.

Bruins Ticket Information For Fans

Posted on Saturday, August 21st, 2010 at 3:48 pm



The Odyssey Box Office have confirmed the release of additional £40.50 tickets for the Boston Bruins match on October 2nd, when the world famous Bruins will face off against the best of the UK Elite League in the Odyssey Arena in Belfast. These tickets are available to purchase now. The All-Star team is gearing up to take on the Bruins and with tickets starting from £40.50 for this once in a lifetime sporting event, fans throughout the UK and Ireland are looking forward to being a part of history.

This is the first time an NHL team has ever played a team from the Elite Ice Hockey League and the first time an Elite League All-Star team has been assembled to take on one of the best teams in the world.

Tickets for the game between the Boston Bruins & the Giants Elite League Selects on October 2nd 2010 are on sale now and can be purchased from the Odyssey Arena Box Office, telephone number 028 9073 9074, or from Ticketmaster by calling 0844 2774455 or by logging onto www.ticketmaster.ie. For those customers calling from North America, please call 011 44 28 9073 9074.

Planning To Come As A Group?

Group Booking enquiries for Travelling Supporters can be made through the Giants office by speaking directly to Shauna on 07547 163627 or by emailing office@belfastgiants.com. We are happy to offer assistance for your group including assistance with hotel bookings, ferry travel and group ticket information.

VIP Packages & Corporate Suites

There are a limited number of VIP packages available, including the best seats in the house, access to the Bruins training session on the morning of the game, two course fork buffet and welcome drink in the private VIP Bar before and during the match. VIP Experience Tickets are £150 each.

Corporate Suites are nearly all booked, but if you or your company are interested in booking a suite, including food and drink, please get in touch with the Giants. Corporate Suite enquiries and VIP Package enquires should be made directly to the Belfast Giants Office by emailing office@belfastgiants.com or by calling 07547 163627.